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Bard

LES PATINEURS

The major text they move around to do
choreoplasty of the soft against the cold
good grant us do not fall
we need the spires of Amiens
to prick up from the winter wan
and pierce that bladder sun
to leak gold on pretty skaters.
How they spin and turn and seldom fall
so cold against the sudden soft collapse
of Aristotle's Qualities dense as cello music
without a spoon to get it down.
Skate up and down my spine (you do),
implicate me in your geomantic fantasy
a leap before breakfast, you have to get up
before dawn to do this right, a leap
the lips strangely distant from the mouth.
Across the evidence a blue shadow, spin,
your scholarly ankles, lyric ass, born
to swarm through air like a spinnaker
backwards into the cheering audience
whirling and wishing, they howl delight,
proponents of imaginary therapies
clustered like shadows in ancient ruins
and you are the only life there is
except for me crouching beside you
counting dimes. This quiet evidence

is how I scream, I think I'm in love,
sit down in my mouth and talk for me
for that matter dissolving a dozen academic
distinctions in a dubious haze of alchemy,
the only news we need to hear is us.
The philosopher's stone is the one you sit on,
the one that's old as radio, dinosaur skin
so far behind it casts no shade at all.
The desert is a land without excuses,
ice's ethics seek to replicate this smooth
unforgivingness, just you, your blades
and gravity, that dreary message from the dead.
When cathedrals fall you break the code.
Continue skating though surely over the intimate
crevasse (the soft, the cold), the sulcus
between the mind and the brain, the sudden
rendezvous of all you are with all I'm not.
Be bewildered. It's the least the banks require
to unglue money from their meanings for it,
a harp hears you maybe and the wind begins.
Outside the winterdrome the brokers get to work
sheltering their paper cups of coffee, buses
seem never to get the knack of passengers,
you have a glory of the purely geometrical,
spiritual camel, sit-spin like God entering the world,
hail, full of grace, the place is lousy with angels.
Show me your practiced smile again,
I need an answer only you can give, you play
the ice by ear, I need to take the measure
of the universe then divide by me — the rest is you
as in je t'aime, a kind of Portugal
where nobody goes but your swift movements

pale as peaches on the black sand. In fact
you have everything I once thought to buy for you,
post-Freudian neurology, outpost of lost time, your moves
impeccable translations from the unthought.

1 March 2001

(begun 28 Feb.)

(last line dreamt, with no remembered context, 9 am on 2 March 2001)

Or you were the skater and I did all the pirouettes
Or was that a kind of eastern thing to eat, something
Fast, cold, bleak and nourishing, like a squeeze
From an unknown hand, endless columns of
Soldiers quietly invading a quiet country.

1 March 2001

(Dream Couplet:)

All items disappear from view
Lost in the Sodom of the text.

1 March 2001

Exaggerate it, the dive light
of the gallery, empty now,
as if the art, that singular commodity,
were still en deshabille,
just itself in its paints and plastics on the wall,
without a shred of commentary

to transvalue apparency
into vague significance
worth a thousand (say)
hours of minimum wage

but I digress. Exaggerate
the light that greyly creeps along the floor

(1 March 2001)

*my voice is no longer
anchored in its single stain.*

I love that flush, that spill
of tea across the tablecloth of light

and here a person knows herself
and says I am a man
I am a personage of history
spilled across the busy Place des Armes

where pigeons strut
planning their campaign against the sky.

2.
it spilled out and is not
my voice any more it is
the sound of itself in any ears

the sly sound of it
born like a car from the fact of highways

because you are there
I only speak

2 March 2001

Free philology. Adjective not imperative.
There is a musical interdiction (sound like this
Don't sound like that) whereby
A river is not so very different from a rat.

Figure out the roots of words and make the tree
Grow upside down, wave those meaty meanings in the air.
Rat-tusk was the squirrel ran up and down and up
Hiding away all the meanings in the sky

Which I suppose is what heaven is, god land,
Safe deposit boxes of everything we ever meant
By talking or by keeping still or touching you.
Yes, you. Did you think the tree could ever forget you?

2 March 2001

[Towards a free philology. Where the *meaning* of a word is indeed an *-ing* event, a verb happening in the mind,
frag grenade, summoning everything that answers its rapping on the door.]

POETRY READING

Just after a I put on my tweed cap
To shield my eyes from the overhead lights
Ashbery reached and read out the line that begins
“Take your hat off.” You can’t win
on this fucking planet but almost
always you can contrive to be relevant.

2 March 2001

LOVE POEM

You were the finest pencil sharpener of all.

2 March 2001

SIMUL

While the French-Canadian poet is reading
A woman passes several hundred feet beyond the window
Trying to catch a snowflake on her tongue.

2 March 2001

A blue flower that blossoms only when you're not looking at it
A window is any painting in a museum until the light changes
Oranges rolls around the floor of the subway like physics lessons
It's snowing we're hurrying to pay some sort of attention
To what is hardly happening at all unless we're very good to it
Marie Brizard liqueurs, crème de noyaux peut-être
Not the kind of bar where they serve pickled eggs but I want one
Anyhow before a great wave loops in out of the murderous sea.

2 March 2001

βιβλια

Wrap a spotted stiff muslin napkin
Beneath your chin. Eat the book
With a spoon. The style,
That gravy, will stain you for hours.

2 March 2001

NEU ROSES

I bring you
loving you hard

give you the noisy gift of my bewilderment
the shabby gilt mirror of my heart.

2 March 2001

Things have a way of getting in the way
so the necessities of the situation — this
is a situation — tend to wear red woolen caps
to stand out from the never-ending snow

the sky snarls at us all day long — and when
I say us I mean not just you and me but them
also and these ostrich farms and potteries
of which the planet thanks to some off-hand

astrological accident is composed, that whole
whose committee makes this tongue we talk
(not quite the same we now, stay with me)
sound like Turks arguing in the basement

while you're trying to hear an old Steve Lacey
track up here on the eternal mezzanine.

3 March 2001

Silence I think is the only power

and you have wielded it
until I'm croaking with unansweredness

Now if I had any sense
I would not have written this down

But would save it in silence
Until the absence of answering choked you too.

3 March 2001

the reason I love opera is they keep singing
while there's life they struggle to communicate
in word and tone and kiss and dagger-play

no one ever at a loss for words, no one ever
silenced by the silences in which he breathes
half-stifled by the prudent revengefulness of things.

3 March 2001

call me the middle of the night
call me a piece of brass
waiting for a sinner's breath
to force a note of music from my bell

as if I were locked in things
and needed fingers not my own
to pry me loose — what else
can Touch me Touch me mean?

3 March 2001
(sleepless, into dawn)

there are things I'm trying to understand
not many, the blue of your eyes
for instance when you're not blue eyed
or the fall of light along a piece of cloth
when the cloth is tenanted by someone
indifferent to the antics of the visible

some people are just realer than the ground
some people just make the context glide
into insignificance like a word misspelled
in a love letter or a bird singing outside your house
when someone dies

there are things
that are trying to understand me too I'm sure
because they keep pressing down so hard
but they'll never plumb my simple layman secrets

and I'll never figure out what makes you you.

4 March 2001

To speak the fantasies out loud
but say no faces

that would be to join the living with the source
of all life, the turbulent
desire at the heart of what there is

So I went down the street and up the stairs
and you were there

close as the window to the light.

5 March 2001

THE FIRE TRAPPED IN GLAZE

At the altar of the Keramikon where Prometheus's
Successful contradiction with the Iron Chef up there
Was celebrated — flames coming out of fennel stalk —

The potters of old Athens tended to congregate
Worshipping and gossiping, the whole melodious opera
Of professionals at one another's throats, smiling,

Smiling. The anger and the resentment we cook
Until it makes the ruddy skin beneath the glaze
Smart like the skin we mean to punish,

Punish with a portion of eternity. After we die
The fire still is burning, the graceful amphora endures
Shipwrecks and museums, people stand around

Wishing they could do something as peaceful
As their fantasies imagine our fierce pottery to be.
Any glazed vessel is a little farm in hell.

5 March 2001

Sapphires. The sense of them.
What we bring
before the altar.
Offering the small
sky to the great sky.

Or rubies to the sun.
We have a funny
Sense of what is right,
we try to do it

perfectly, color
by color, texture
by text, the raw, the crude,

the perfected thing.
The made thing
woven of our thinking

into empty space.

5 March 2001